

# Aim for the Stars

**M**eet Shirley Ann Jackson, a great African American scientist. Her father once told her, “Aim for the stars, so that you can reach the treetops, and at least you’ll get off the ground.” Jackson has lived her life by these words.



## Exploring the World Through Science

Jackson’s love of science began when she was eight. “As I was growing up, I became fascinated that the world around me was a world of secrets,” Jackson said. She decided to explore that world. As a little girl, Jackson loved to study bees. She captured bees in jars and watched them. She created her own laboratory under the back porch of her house.

## Shirley’s Need for Speed

Shirley also loved to build things. She used science to build and race a homemade hot rod! Her hot rod was a car made of wood and old parts. She would start at the top of a big hill and her friends would give her a push. Shirley loved to experiment with ways to make her hot rod faster. Once a mean boy broke Shirley’s hot rod. She decided that the best way to fight back was to build a new hot rod—one that was even faster. On the day of the race, Shirley was ready with her new hot rod. With her new design, she came in first place!

## Leading the Way for Others

Now that Shirley is grown up, she doesn’t race hot rods any more. But she still uses her love of science to guide young scientists who study at her university. Shirley studied hard in high school and college and earned a Ph.D. (the most advanced college degree). Today, she is President of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the oldest technology research university in the United States. For many years she worked as a research scientist who studies the insides of **atoms**. (Atoms make up everything in the universe, but they are so tiny that you can’t see them, even with a microscope.)

She believes that education opens doors in life. She asks, “Why limit your possibilities in life when there is an exciting world out there waiting for your brainpower?” Listen to the advice Shirley’s father gave her, and aim for the stars.